

Reading the Land

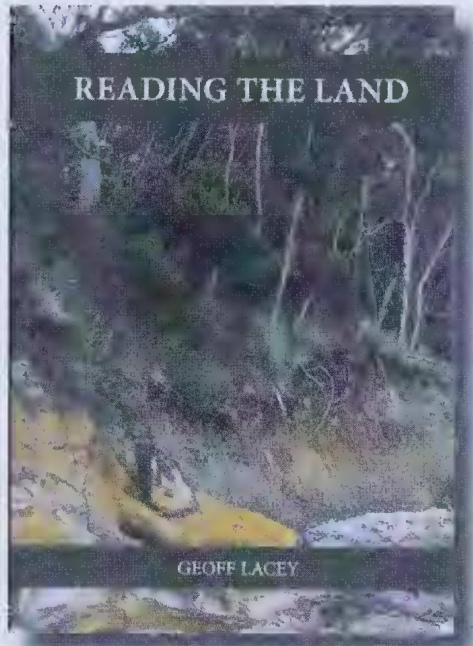
by Geoff Lacey

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Understanding the landscape is integral to conservation efforts, and conserving the landscape is integral not only to survival of humanity but to all living things, a fact often taken for granted. Geoff Lacey takes us on a journey through the natural history of central Victoria (briefly) and French Island. The journey begins by evoking a feeling of continuity with the past, reminding us of our heritage and that the land is important for our spiritual as well as our physical well-being. To achieve this, Geoff uses quotes from many sources including a beautiful poem by Bill Neidjie, expressing the Aboriginal sense of intimacy with the land.

The key concepts relating to landscape patterns, how they have changed with time, the geology, the flora and fauna are described. The regular use of quotes from historians, naturalists and those who lived on the land or simply visited it, adds a further layer of interest and intrigue to these descriptions. The text is supported by easy-to-read maps, a small glossary, notes on sources, an index and a table listing the indigenous plant species at study sites. However, readers without some knowledge of plants and their communities would do well to have a picture book of Victorian plants close to hand for navigating through the many vegetation descriptions and lists of their characteristic species. Some photographs of plants and vegetation communities are provided, as well as reproductions of two beautiful artworks: *Snowy Bluff on the Wonnangatta River* by Eugene von Guerard (1864) and *Bush Track, Dromana* by Louis Buvelot (1875).

The book is a great resource for understanding the natural history of the land, not just central Victoria and French Island but elsewhere as well, since the key concepts and methodology of reading the land can be applied to other situ-



ations. For this reason alone, the book is well worth acquiring, but it also provides an interesting and thought-provoking read: food for both the mind and the soul.

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